

Book Reviews

Traditional Japanese Theatre: An Anthology of Plays. Edited by Karen Brazell. Columbia University Press, N.Y., 1998. 464 pages. \$49.50, cloth.

Reviewed by
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Karen Brazell's new anthology fills a significant gap in English publications on Japanese theatre. While many translations of Noh, Kabuki and Bunraku plays exist, this book represents the first attempt to place a comprehensive survey under one cover. Brazell's inclusion of historical perspectives, descriptions of performance elements and detailed stage directions as well as an exhaustive glossary make this a most welcome volume: an ideal text in any Japanese drama survey course.

Brazell casts a wide net; the anthology includes translation of seven Noh, nine Kyogen, and nine Kabuki/Bunraku texts. In addition to these four "central" traditional theatre styles, Brazell has made room for chapters on lesser-known performance practices that include a kowaka text and two puppet plays from the Awaji island tradition. Structural unity is generated by Brazell's thoughtful selection of plays of different genres that feature common plots, characters or themes. For example, the thunder god theme is represented in all four central styles. Plays based on the Atsumori legend are given three treatments, Shunkan and Dojōji two treatments.

Seventeen translators provide texts for the volume, their contrasting literary priorities providing strength to the survey. For example, Don Kenny's Kyogen adaptations attempt to reproduce the archaic stylization of the originals. Carolyn Haynes, on the other hand, translates with an attempt to colloquialize many obscure passages. ("With all my heart" in the former is rendered "at your service" in the latter.) These differences in style suggest how the texts read in the original Japanese as well as provide valuable interpretive insights.

The translations are generally strong. The wealth of stage directions and their conspicuous placement on the page suggests that the editor considers the visual aspects of the production to be as significant as the text. However, readability is often compromised. The vague typesetting only makes the situation worse. Both difficulties could have been overcome by placing stage directions in the margin. In this manner they would be readily available if needed, but not so prominent as to impede the flow of the text. (*The Nippon Gakujutsu Shinkokai Noh Series* is an example of this strategy.)

It is telling to note that in a 561-page book surveying traditional Japanese theatre, paragraphs two and three in the introduction are devoted to descriptions of contemporary or experimental work influenced by Noh, Kabuki and Bunraku. The all-male

performance tradition is addressed in paragraph four. Brazell then launches into an authoritative nineteen-page history of Japanese theatre.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Brazell's writing comes in the "General Characteristics" which follow. Here she explicates some similarities between the four central theatrical forms.

1) "The Text Speaks Itself" The language of traditional Japanese theatre, be it spoken, chanted, or sung, is not preoccupied with reproducing "natural" dialogue as understood in the West. For example, the Noh chorus often chants text that logically would be spoken by a single actor. Or, as is common in Kabuki, one line may be divided and "passed along" among several actors. Brazell suggests that the origin of these characteristics may lie in the grammatical ambiguities of the Japanese language. She provides interesting examples to demonstrate these attributes from the Kabuki play "Saint Narukami" and the Noh "Tadanori."

2) "Flexibility of Time and Space" to the "fluid and malleable" progression of stage time and the non-realistic treatment of scenic space in Japanese theatre. In short, the Aristotelian unities are wholly absent. Narration (or self-narration) plays a large role in establishing setting and temporal progression, but the physical characteristics peculiar to the various stages is also influential, i.e. turntable, *hanamichi*, *hashigakari*, etc.

3) "Centrality of Form" states that the building blocks of Japanese theatre performance are fixed physical and vocal patterns. The actors and musicians learn these forms through years of training by imitation, usually beginning in childhood. "Questions of interpretation" arise only when the performer reaches maturity. Strict adherence to form need not hinder creativity on the part of the artist. Brazell insightfully uses the analogy of Western classical music performance to convey the flexibility that can exist within codification.

4) "Theatricalization of the Mechanics of Theatre" explains the aesthetic value placed on pageantry and the incorporation of non-dramatic aspects of the production into the play. The use of on-stage puppeteers, musicians and stage attendants are examples of these characteristics. Costume changes, scenery shifts, and curtain drops visible to the audience also add to the spectacle. Brazell points out that these devices reflect the lack of interest in mimesis in traditional Japanese theatre.

5) "Intensity of Intertextuality" is a particularly well-explicated passage that cuts right to the heart of what distinguishes the traditional Japanese arts from their Western counterparts. As Brazell skillfully articulates, originality is not as highly praised in Japan as it is in the West. Rather "copying, alluding to, manipulating and varying the familiar are accorded high aesthetic praise." Consequently it is useful to have in one anthology several treatments of the same legend or character. This allows the reader comparison not only between specific theatre genres, but of the historical periods during which they were created.

But perhaps Brazell is a little too trusting of these parallel translations to provide complete structural cohesion to her book. If read cover-to-cover (an admittedly un-

likely prospect given this book's audience) the outline might strike some as unwieldy. The incursion of historical perspectives, general characteristics (above) and description of the physical stages in the introduction is logical. However the translations of four plays from different genres that follow seem erroneously placed, particularly when specific performance elements are not described until later chapters. In the classroom, the premature placement of these translations in the introduction may prove effective, but for the general readership the value is doubtful.

Nevertheless, this is a welcome volume. The book provides not only valuable insights into Japanese theatre but also the history and culture which informed it. Brazel is professor in the Department of Asian Studies at Cornell University. Her other publications include a National Book Award winning translation of *The Confessions of Lady Nijo*. The current volume is worthy of a place alongside her many fine writings on the Noh theatre. *Traditional Japanese Theatre: An Anthology of Plays* is an indispensable text for any Japanese theatre survey course.

Under the Shadow of Nationalism: Politics and Poetics of Rural Japanese Women. By Mariko Asano Tamanoi. University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu. 1998. 273 pages. \$52.00, cloth; \$29.25, paper.

Reviewed by
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I want to go home
I want to see my house
I want to see my mother's face
Even if I cannot see her, I want to talk to somebody about my wretched life

Working people do not make good clay for the kiln of cultural theory because they frequently refuse to play the role of cultural representative of nation or ethnicity. In their own *bisque* of life, their struggles are complex and resist linear description. Not for them the trite pleasure of being a research object of 'national culture'. Their lives bring the researcher uneasily close to issues of sweat and dirt, justice and the right to work, health and literacy and housing for adults, children and the old. Matters of class and exploitation are thus uncomfortable topics to many professional academics who would rather talk about nicer, funkier aspects of 'culture'.

Here we emphasize the need to respect the 'complexity' of a person and complexity in general is a feature of rational inquiry which St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa* (later glossed by Bernard Lonergan S. J. as "insight"), posed as the foundation for the rational mind *in situ*. Therefore, when talking about 'culture' rather than paring down, it is, therefore, not merely a scholarly *desideratum* to resist simplification but rather a

moral imperative. Not everyone would agree. However, consider the notion of complexity from the point of view of studies on Japan and the havoc wrought when the principle is ignored. It is the fate of working men and women in Japan to have their personal identities — their ‘voices’ — vicariously suppressed and subordinated to a national identity or cultural description. This distortion (‘extortion’?) is no less the work of cynical government than rapacious foreign scholarship which never tires of building the smoky mountain of studies of “the Japanese”. It never stops. Nay, any excellent academic bristling with credentials and with the professed aim of eliminating stereotypes can visit Japan for twelve months and leave as a Japan expert teeming with vernicose theory and a book draft on some aspect of “the Japanese”. Newspapers and magazines, meanwhile, continue to churn out their cover pictures of a samurai in a business suit, a Hokusai mounting-wave backdrop, the headline ‘East meets West’ or the picture of a woman in a kimono waving a cellular phone: old dog tricks that never die. If it provokes genuine disgust among many ordinary Japanese, it produces weariness among many others. When will academic *opera* privilege working people’s voices themselves? When will working people be allowed to chart their own histories and challenge the dominant national history or history as narrated by the dominant class of academics? Cultural anthropologists, in particular, ought to know better and it is a relief to find that one anthropologist, Mariko Asano Tamanoi, does know better.

This is a book about the surrogate mother of the nation, good wife and wise mother of silkworms and silk thread. The decline of the silkworm industry in 1920s Japan implied the need for an alternative ideology and, sure enough, the state apparatus found one. She was cast as *joñin*, one who embodied an authentic tradition, a modern farm women in the kitchen of Japan. Against this falsehood the only answer of the illiterate and the oppressed is vigorous resistance: song and play. In telling this story, Mariko Asano Tamanoi has written a sound and interesting book which does not tritely simplify or explain too much. It is successful because it respects the complexity of people’s lives. It is successful because she is faithful to her subject about whom she writes intelligently and even, one may say, with love.

I read this book on a train whilst recalling a period long ago in my own life in Scotland. On cold misty mornings before matins, we schoolboys could saunter a short track between the heather to a point on a hill overlooking the valley. Tibetan monks were building on the bluff opposite. The monks, exiles from the Chinese invasion, sold candles in a charity shop. The candles were orange and yellow. Exotic and foul-smelling. Down below, you could see the Scottish city of Dumfries, the slate roofs of wool factories, blue smoke from long black chimneys. Political and religious resistance is often imagined on hills. Monasteries well know this. Charles Wesley and Che Guevara knew this. Through the Tibetan monks, we learned something about oppression and state terror in foreign lands. How ironic, I thought, that they should settle in Britain and on Scottish uplands where generations of highland people had been systematically slaughtered or starved by London governments. A further irony was Lon-

don's idealization of the Scots 'People'. The Kings and Queens and England built their summer palaces in Scotland and even now don kilts and plaid for the grouse shooting season on their large private estates. Another curious feature of the historical exploitation of these northern people was the system of indenture whereby young Scots women became the domestic servants and no-nonsense nursemaids for the nation's ruling class. Scots women still feature in that xeric genre of British television and films which play up the good old days of the British Empire. In the upstairs and downstairs of British upper class homes, Scots nursemaids were definitely downstairs. In this connected landscape of indenture, decaying wool mills, unemployment and the idealization of 'the worker' (whom industrial capitalism at the same patiently exploited) the reviewer read of the nursemaids (*komori*) in the Japanese highlands of Nagano. As a centrepiece of state ideology and practice, workers in the factories and mills of Vladivostok or Boston or Liverpool have long been made to play the game of surrogate heroes of the nation when it suited governments to want it so. No less a role was carved out for the *komori* whose story Tamanoi exquisitely tells.

The importance of their labour for state ideology is well described in this book: "The everyday lives of *komori*, however, were powerfully shaped by the historical development of the nation-state of Japan, especially the state's broad effort to incorporate the masses into a newly articulate "civilized" and "enlightened" Japanese citizenship. *Komori* became the object of such description, examination, and reformation. Almost every commoner, male or female, was expected to be civilized and enlightened as a new Japanese citizen. However, the state was particularly concerned with the "evil customs of the past" among farmers, who still comprised more than 70 percent of the nation's population in the late nineteenth century. For example, the habits of rural young men who, in the words of official decrees "acted in groups, made merry, argued with each other, and drank and ate in public," thus "damaging local customs and mores," became the state's target for reformation. Furthermore, local people were expected to get rid of publicly displayed phallic images, abandon the custom of mixed bathing, wear shoes instead of walking on bare feet" (p. 59).

As mentioned above, what is valuable about Tamanoi's ethnographic reconstruction of working people's everyday life in Nagano is that she renders a voice to those who, in representations of them, are voiceless, a people without a history who (redolent of Said, 1989) have never been able to represent their own history and emotions and culture. The writer remarks: "*komori* did hear and manage to read what was spoken and written about them; they were frustrated by how others represented their lives and often attempted to resist these descriptions. . . . The *komori*'s resistance should be understood as part of everyday practices in which they tried to communicate their conscious rejection of the representation of their culture in the state's discourse on elementary education" (p. 59). The 'practice' referred to by Tamanoi took the form of song, classic tool of resistance among the powerless, the peasant, the illiterate, the oppressed:

Sleep!
Are you not sleeping, stupid baby?

I do not want to be working as a *komori*
for this crying baby.
Master, could you please give me some time off?
I want to go home
(p. 78).

The *komori*'s songs consistently part company with the image of gentle, nurturing mother earnestly cultivated in the "good wife, wise mother" ideology.

This baby cries a lot
I want to exchange it for someone else's.
What can we do with a naughty child?
Let's put him on the drum
and hit him with green bamboo sticks
(ibid)

The emotional burden on the indentured worker is also reflected in song:

I fear my mistress
much more than my master.
She also watches me with her white and black eyes.

and

Listen my master and mistress
If you treat me badly,
I may have an evil influence on your kid

The *komori*'s song — rude, mocking, bitter, humorous — embodies an alternative discourse from that of nationalist discourse. It mocks the 'moral teaching' specially designed for *komori*, which expected them to become *fujin*; it mocks also the discourse of the middle-class where the subjectivity of *komori* was fashioned and which the *komori*'s song was able to retrieve. In these strong songs, the *komori* was able to affirm her personal humanity.

It is not serendipity that war and colonialism have a tangential relation to the history of women's struggle for political rights. When Russia encountered difficulties during the war with Japan in 1905, women of Finland took advantage of the situation and gained considerable internal autonomy. In 1907, Finnish women got the vote — the first country in Europe to put them of the same footing as men in elections. Thus whilst Northern women in the Turku and Copenhagen hinterlands were enjoying unprecedented freedom, the women in the silk-spinning factories of Nagano were becoming the centrepiece of state ideology and practice. From the nineteenth century onward, women in central Japan provided cheap labour for industry, the silk spinning

industry in particular. They worked as farm labourers, nursemaids, domestics. *Under the Shadow of Nationalism* explores the interconnectedness of nationalism and gender in the context of modern Japan. It combines Tamanoi's field research in Nagano among government records, social reformers' reports, ethnographic data as well as teachers' manuals, labour activists' accounts, village newspapers. It is an illuminating examination of an important group of Japanese women as national subjects through the lens of Japanese modernity and postmodernity.

In Chapter 2, Tamanoi describes her site of field research and also what happens when rural space becomes national space, how the state created and controlled various women's organizations from the beginning of the Meiji period to the early 1970s. There is description also of how Nagano rural women created their own groups in the 1970s in opposition to the state-led women's associations. The rest of the book is organized around the life cycles of several generations of Nagano rural women as they grow, marry, have children and grandchildren, age and die. The rural women of Nagano engaged in various kinds of *hataraki* (occupation). They were *komori* when young (Chapter 3) and during the industrial revolution worked in the silk spinning factories built throughout Nagano prefecture (Chapter 4). In Chapters 5 and 6 two different but related discourses are introduced: Japanese folklore studies and agrarianism. Both assumed importance in the nationalist discourse of the early twentieth century. Both discourses treated "rural" women as important national subjects. Folklorists depicted them as *joimin* women but eventually made *joimin* into "Japanese". This book is a box of memories gathered over the last two decades in a context in which state, market and transnational capitalism now play even deeper roles in the configuration of workers' lives. Nationalism is not dead (p. 22) as Tamanoi stresses, although rural women no longer fit the role of "Japanese women" that they used to. However, both before and after the Nagano Olympics of 1998, Nagano takes on a new role as a source of cheap land and labour. As corporations move into Nagano from the metropolitan centres, young rural women *faute de mieux* seek work as part-time labourers in the manufacturing industries to maintain Japanese domestic capitalism. This book reverberates with good tales and ballad. Factotum of an era, a *komori*'s work is never done:

Komori's work is indeed cruel
I came into this town of Chaya,
when I was seven or eight
to work as a komori.
I find my mistress so mean
She tells me to do this and that
all day long.
I wish New Year would come sooner.
When New Year comes,
with my belongings and sandals in my hands

I will say
“Thank you my mistress for your kindness.”
She will say,
“Do come back again,”
but will never ever return (Matsunaga Goichi)

The Japanese Way of Tea: From Its Origins in China to Sen Rikyu. By Sen Sošhitsu, translated by V. Dixon Morris. University of Hawa’i Press, Honolulu. 1998. 264 pages. \$19.95, paper.

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The Japanese tea ceremony is for many Japanese as well as Westerners a lengthy and meaningless ritual. According to the great Japanologist, Basil Hall Chamberlain, “when witnessed more than once, it becomes intolerably monotonous.” To others, the simple act of drinking a cup of tea acquires deep spiritual and philosophic significance. The tea ceremony, with its Zen trappings, its stress on etiquette and proper observation of forms, may represent the quintessence of Japanese culture. Sen Sošhitsu, the fifteenth-generation Iemoto of the Urasenke School of tea and author of *The Japanese Way of Tea*, attempts a clear explanation of the history of tea culture in Japan — how the formalities have evolved and why the drinking of tea, in Japan, is special. Why is there a “Japanese way of tea?” “Why have the Japanese alone made something so ordinary so very special?” (xxv) The book sets out to answer these questions, and in the process provides an authoritative and highly readable account of the Japanese tea ceremony.

The book is divided into three parts. Part I traces the origins of tea culture in Japan to its Chinese roots. The author presents a detailed analysis of *The Classic of Tea (Chajing)* by Lu Yu (ca. 733–803), a Chinese scholar-official and tea-drinking recluse. His work, which described the origin, cultivation, and tools for tea, indeed did become a classic. Lu Yu came to be revered as the “god of tea” and the *Chajing* continued to stimulate tea drinkers in China and Japan up to modern times.

Lu Yu extolled the virtues of tea. Not only did tea, properly cultivated, properly processed, and properly prepared, have the power to cure illness, but (more importantly) it was akin to the elixir of the sages. Tea had the power to transport a person into a world apart — a world of beauty and spiritual depth. Sen Sošhitsu quotes a poem by Lu Tong, another Tang period aficionado of tea, to show how tea drinking had become equated with spiritual escape. By drinking tea one was able to rise above the vexations of the mundane and cross over into a dimension of total freedom:

“The first cup fully moistens lips and throat
The second cup banishes isolations
The third cup makes one sharp and ready to read five thousand scrolls.
...
The sixth cup makes one commune with the immortals.” (20)

Part II examines the arrival of tea in Japan. It begins with a conventional account of the introduction of tea into Japan. Kūkai, returning to Japan in 806 from his studies in China, plays the leading role. Sen Sošitsu goes on, however, to show how Kūkai and other Japanese who had traveled to China were heirs not only to tea drinking, but to the culture of tea as expounded in the works of Lu Yu. Thus Heian period poets and the cultivated members of Japan’s aristocratic society in general became enthusiastic tea drinkers, modeling themselves on Chinese practices. Sugawara no Michizane is representative of the Heian converts: “So fine is the fragrance of hot tea, one forgets drinking wine.” (54) Following the Chinese model, Japanese came to see tea as an indispensable ingredient in creating an ideal world of human freedom.

The author skips quickly to the thirteenth century, from the early Heian period and the poetic adventures of the court nobility to the beginning of the Kamakura period and the bloody deeds of the warrior ruling class. Unexplained is the decline and disappearance of tea drinking in Japan. Explained is the story of Eisai, a man credited with the introduction of Zen Buddhism into Japan, and the re-introduction of tea. In 1214 he presented Shogun Sanetome with a copy of his “Drinking Tea for Health” (*Kissa Yojōki*) which quoted Lu Yu and other Chinese texts on tea, but stressed instead the medicinal and practical effects of tea. Eisai was convinced that the world had entered into the latter stage of the Buddhist law (*mappō*) and that tea drinking was the key to preserving health in such degenerate times. According to the author, Eisai, like Kūkai before him, sought to propagate approaches to tea drinking that were current in China, which had presumably become extremely utilitarian. (66)

The scene then shifts to an examination of tea rituals in Buddhist, primarily Zen, institutions during the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Dōgen’s *Eihei Shingi*, a book of Zen discipline, frequently mentioned rites involving the drinking of tea, providing careful regulations on questions of timing, service, and formalities of etiquette. Sen Sošitsu concludes that many of the elements that exist in a modern, formal service of tea can be found in these religious rites. (82)

However, while tea services in religious institutions were laying the groundwork for the aesthetics of the Japanese tea ceremony, secular trends in tea drinking were pointing in different directions. In perhaps the most interesting chapter in the book, Sen Sošitsu describes a vogue in tea contests which developed in the fourteenth century. Here tea became sheer entertainment involving gambling and extravagant displays of wealth and power. Civil aristocrats, priests, and members of the upper crust of samurai society were active participants in tea contests, which became regular events in the social calendar. Special pavilions were built for the enjoyment of the

tea contests and gradually the fashion spread to merchants and commoners aspiring for inclusion in the social elite. It is interesting to note that *wabicha*, the epitome of tranquility, social harmony, and aesthetic restraint, was developing at the same time, and often drawing some of its inspiration from these vulgar tea drinking contests.

Part III deals with the birth of the Japanese “way” of tea in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The author examines the thinking of three tea masters, Murata Juko, Takeno Joo, and Sen Rikyu, who were the creators and transmitters of a unique aesthetic tradition based on the service of tea. Here we leave behind the gambling and the gaudiness of the earlier tea culture for the austerity of a grass hut and the forlorn simplicity of ideals such as *wabi* and *sabi*. Ironically, the way of tea, with its emphasis on the sublime and the everyday, reached its peak during the bloody years of the late warring states period. Great generals such as Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi were among the most active patrons of the tea ceremony. Sen Sošitsu, however, is not a social historian. He does not take up the intriguing relationship between art and power, but concentrates on the internal development of tea aesthetics, architecture, and forms of etiquette (*saho*). Tea developed into a profound philosophical and spiritual system, revolutionary in its stress on equality and freedom and unsettling in its attempt to create new standards of beauty. In trying to understand Sen Rikyu’s motivation, emphasis is given to Rikyu’s personal religious experience. According to the author, “an extremely positive, active spiritual movement wrought a revolution in the established values of the day.” (174) Under Rikyu’s guidance, the simple act of drinking tea became a means to enter into a separate, higher sphere of consciousness.

The Japanese practice, naturally, invites comparisons with the role tea has played in China, albeit with less ritualized practices of drinking, in development of art and philosophy centered on “a world apart.” Moreover, it invites questions about Rikyu’s debt to China, past and present. While Sen Sošitsu’s book begins with an examination of tea drinking in China, it leaves that story in the Tang period. A future study, one hopes, will explore the fascinating interactions of tea culture in China and Japan.

The *Japanese Way of Tea* is a reliable and valuable introduction to the history of the Japanese tea ceremony. The book neatly complements the 1989 volume of essays on the tea ceremony, *Tea in Japan: Essays on the History of Chanoyu*, edited by Paul Varley and Isao Kumakura. The translation by V. Dixon Morris is extremely well done. The author’s story line, however, is perhaps too well known: “we shall examine the origins of tea in China and follow tea drinking practices after they crossed over into Japan down to the time of Rikyu and the creation of the art of *chanoyu*.” (xxvii). According to this scenario, tea drinking and rituals associated with tea drinking were introduced to Japan from China in the Heian period, along with other aspects of sophisticated continental culture. Over time tea and other “foreign” cultural forms become internalized and develop unique Japanese qualities. In the medieval period there is some contest between vulgar and more elevated experiments, but in the end the more profound mode of cultural production wins out and the Japanese way of tea is born.

Of course this is an extreme over-simplification and does not do justice to the depth of Sen Sošitsu's scholarship. Nonetheless, I think the story of "Japanization," to put it baldly, is much more complex and messy. On the one hand we can see the continuous flow of continental cultural forms into Japan, from the Tang period through the Ming period and thereafter. On the other hand, and Sen Sošitsu refers often to this phenomena, Japanese cultural leaders have the entire history of Chinese cultural forms at their disposal. In other words, Japan is influenced both by "contemporary" Chinas and by past Chinas. Moreover, within Japan, there is rarely a simple transition from one mode of cultural production to another. Vulgar tea contests overlapped with the onset of the grass hut tradition; the "magnificent steed in a straw hut" expresses well the contradictions of culture in the Warring States period. The author hints at this complexity, but prefers the straight line of cultural transmission and indiginization to messy post-modern approaches to historical change. *The Japanese Way of Tea*, while unquestionably the best book in English on the history of the tea ceremony, also provides much fuel for debate about modes of cultural production in Japan and the realities of transmission of cultural forms and values between different places and different times.